DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 332 248 CS 507 457

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TITLE The Power Game: Sexual Harassment on the College Campus.
PUB DATE Apr 91
NOTE 24p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern States Communication Association (Tampa, FL, April 3-7, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Faculty; *College Students; Higher Education; *Interpersonal Communication; *Sexual Harassment; *Student Attitudes; Student College Relationship; Student Problems; Student Rights; *Teacher Behavior; *Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Communication Behavior; Power Equalization; Sex Exploitation; Social Judgment Theory

ABSTRACT

A study examined four reports of sexual harassment on college campuses. The reports show that harassers "key" their victims so that a contest will begin but the victims do not understand what is happening. Miscommunication occurs when power myths about men and women intersect during the harassment episode. Such myths include: the looking and touching myth, the failure to report myth, the macho man myth and the consenting adult myth. When placed in a harassment episode, women make decisions about the action and the professor. These decisions, examined in light of social judgment-involvement theory, indicate that feelings of powerlessness are the single strongest element perpetrating sexual harassment. Both sexes help to create an environment ripe for sexual harassment by: (1) trying not to respond and hoping it will go away; (2) attempting to impugn the reputations of the women attempting to change the system; (3) protecting the reputations of the ritually active men; and (4) ignoring the issue of sexual harassment which, until recently, has received little attention. Students should be informed about sexual harassment, and learn that they do not have to put up with it. Institutions, in turn, need to take such steps as instituting a grievance procedure and protecting the privacy of the victim, to protect themselves and students against the harassers. (Twenty-five references are included.) (PRA)

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THE POWER GAME: SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON THE COLLEGE CAMPUS

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[2250 words]

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THE POWER GAME: SEXUAL HARASSMENT ON THE COLLEGE CAMPUS

KAY PAYNE

[2250 words]

This study examines four reports of sexual harassment. The paper argues that harassers "key" their victims that a contest will begin but the victims do not understand. Miscommunication occurs when myths about men and women intersect during the harassment episode. Such myths include: the looking and touching myth, the failure to report myth, the macho man myth and the consenting adult myth. When placed in a harassment episode, women make decisions about the action and the professor. These decisions are examined in light of Social Judgment-Involvement theory.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 established that sex discrimination was illegal and that sexual harassment constituted sex discrimination. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination in educational institutions that receive federal funds. Yet, cases involving this type of discrimination have fallen through the cracks. New legislation promoting anti-discrimination statutes, forces, even coerces, universities who receive any federal money for any program to respond to all complaints of sexual harassment (Blum, 1988). This legislation represents a major victory for those who have been struggling with matters of sexual harassment.

Singer (1989) reports that out of the many college students who experience some form of sexual harassment every year, only 2% to 3% of

them report it. Students at one small university report as high as 89% of women experienced sexual harassment at least once, and that many experienced it more than once (Mazur & Percival, 1989). (Men also reported 85% incidence of sexual harassment, but they perceive and react to it differently than do women.) The increasing problem ranges from the use of sexual humor and innuendoes, to comments about how a person dresses, to physical threats and sexual assaults. The effects of sexual harassment include emotional problems (Backhouse & Cohen, 1981; Gutek, 1985); physical problems (Hadjifotiou, 1983); psychological problems (Crull, 1980; Tangri, Burt, & Johnson, 1982); and reduced performance (Crull, 1982).

Sexual harassment is not always recognizable because men's perceptions of what their behavior means are vastly different from women's (Fitzgerald, 1986). Involving complex two-way messages with intentions of accomplishing multiple and incompatible goals, sexual harassment is exacerbated by an imbalance of power (Bingham & Burleson, 1989). For example, the harasser may see himself as intending to exercise his power over women, protect his professional turf, enhance his macho self-image, and demonstrate his friendliness and helpfulness. The harassee may want to stop the harassment, deter future incidents, preserve her reputation, avoid retaliation, maintain rapport with her professor, preserve self-respect, physical safety, and psychological well being (Backhouse & Cohen, 1981; Bingham;, 1988; Farley, 1978). While the harassee may want to stop it, she feels she can not stop it, but has to go along with it. Sexual harassment always involves <u>unwelcome</u> sexual advances, requests for sexual favors,

and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature (Johnson, 1983). Sexual harassment on the college campus by a professor, always involves an abuse of power. Even if the woman engages in sex willingly with her professor, does not report it to his supervisor, and does not lose any tangible benefit, the view by the American Association of University Professors is that at best, he has breached his professional ethics.

This paper argues that the formal structure of society reflects the myths of the environment rather than the demands of task activities. Since sexual harassment is a power issue rather than a sexual one (MacKinnon, 1979), power myths about men and women will be described. This paper examines the messages in four sexual harassment reports from women. Since the reports exhibit only a one sided perception of the situation, only her communication about the incident will be examined. The stories will report examples of the looking and touching myth, the failure to report myth, the macho man myth, and the consenting adult myth.

The power myths about men and women during sexual harassment will suggest a sort of contest occurs during sexual harassment. Contests involve play, and play suggests that all those participating have a clear appreciation that play is occuring. Bateson (1955) describes the play of animals, indicating that they signal one other that play will begin, then playfully stalk, chase, and attack each other. On some other signal, the play stops. A well known type of "guided doing" occurs. But, in the case of playing, if more than one participant is involved all must be freely willing to play. Everyone

must understand the rules of play and have the power to refuse an invitation to play or to terminate the play once it has begun. In the case of sexual harassment, men appear to be playing a game which women do not understand, do not know the rules, and feel threatened by the more dominant participant. Women, however, who understand it as play and "roll with it" or harass right back are often described by men as fitting in better. But, in an unmatched contest, knowing when to quit remains the responsibility of the stronger player. The sexual harassment stories in this research will indicate that the harassers "keyed" the women or signaled them, that "play" was about to begin, and that the women did not understand the rules of the game.

Who participates in a contest is often determined by willingness to play. Social judgment-involvement theory of persuasion (Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965) has two key concepts both of which are internally based in the receiver. The first of these concepts, anchor points or internal reference points, which each of us has inside us, are used when we make judgments about people or actions. We turn to our internal reference points and compare the information regarding the judgment with the relevant anchor points. You make your judgment only in reference to your anchors. The second part of the theory indicates that a concept may fall within a person's latitude of acceptance, latitude of non-commitment or latitude of rejection. The theory predicts that receivers are extremely vulnerable to persuasion within their latitude of acceptance, almost immune from persuasion in their latitude of rejection, and open to persuasion about concepts in their latitude of noncommitment. The reports will reveal at which

latitude each woman reacted to the sexual harassment persuasion.

Myths About Men And Women.

Historically, humans have found life bewildering. To cope with confusion, uncertainty, and chaos, humans create a variety of symbols. To understand social problems, communication researchers have begun using symbolic artifacts, such as myths, to describe beliefs that bind people together and explain their worlds (Meyer, 1982). Social structures cause rationalized rules which emerge from myths. Subsequently, myths become legitimatized in the structure and the rules and the structure perpetuate the myth. Once a myth becomes legitimatized, humans accept it unquestioningly. Several myths about men, women and power help to explain sexual harassment.

An ancient bible myth describes the part power plays in the sexual exchange. In Genesis 9:20-25 an incident about Noah and his three sons sets up the power hierarchy:

> Noah became a farmer and planted a vineyard and he made wine. One day as he was drunk and lay naked in his tent, Ham, the father of Canaan (a country), saw his father's nakedness and went outside and told his two brothers. Then Shem and Japheth took a robe and held it over their shoulders and walking backwards into the tent let it fall across their father to cover his nakedness as they looked the other way. When Noah awoke from his drunken stupor and learned what had happened and what Ham, his younger son, had done he cursed Ham's descendents: "A curse upon the Canaanites," he swore. "May they be the lowest of slaves...To

the descendants of Shem and Japheth" (Tyndale, 1971).

It was believed that if someone saw you naked they had power over you. The strength of this myth caused Noah to curse his own son for seeing him naked because it threw the hierarchal power structure of the family out of balance. Since sexual harassment is a power issue (MacKinnon, 1979), it can be understood in terms of the power hierarchy. If the path to power is through education, as our culture has for a long time claimed, then the established power hierarchy is threatened because women have been admitted into the educational process. Looking and touching messages subtly act as power-plays; threatening sexual moves toward women students intensify the power message. Sexual harassment, therefore, acts in a gatekeeping role.

Men often perceive sexual moves toward a woman as just part of the macho self-image. Consistent with this view is the myth which holds that men are not capable of sexual restraint. Women in America have typically been assigned the responsibility of saying "no" or "stop" to men when they advance sexually (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971), while that may not be true in other cultures. Men often defend one another, when accused of wrongful sexual conduct, by saying "After all, they're only human." The popular television program Cheers perpetuates the concept of the macho male image incapable of sexual restraint in the character of Sam Malone. Even in the 1990's, society still perpetuates the concept that men are barely able to control their sexual appetites and aggressions. Raul Julia, in the movie Tequilla Sunrise, claimed that you simply cannot blame a man for following his lustful desires. Dzeich & Weiner (1984) say that such

an attitude suggests that man is at the mercy of his genitals.

Another myth claims that since women fail to report cases of sexual harassment, then nothing is wrong when, in fact, they fail to report sexual harassment due to feelings of powerlessness (Dzeich & Weiner, 1984). Kramarae (1981) describes this as the muted group theory. The theory suggests that women are not allowed to stir up trouble. Besides, no one would listen anyway. Or, possibly they may not know how to go about reporting such an incident. Professors may believe, then, that since no one has complained, they must not be guilty. Avoidance of reporting strategies simply indicate that students are sensitive to the power imbalance. Also, women predicted that if they reported the incident, the harasser would be less likely to stop his harassing behavior and more likely to retaliate against the victim (Bingham & Burleson, 1989). Most sexual harassment policies suggest that the first step in dealing with harassment is for the victim to confront the offender and simply ask him to stop. One woman reported that the process frightened her so much that she put her words in memo form because she could not speak them. When she confronted the harasser with the memo, she sat a moment, then, ran to the restroom with a bloody nose. Her experience demonstrates how stressful it can be to confront the harasser. In fact, women often defend themselves against harassment with humor or by sidestepping the issue rather than confronting it head on.

Occasionally, women students are attracted to faculty. The professorial role may be attractive because it combines intellectual attainment and power (Dzeich & Weiner, 1984). The consenting adult

myth suggests that when one is attracted to a role or a person; sex follows. Since an unequal relationship exists, the power disparity creates a situation where, even if the student has sex with the professor, she might not have done so were the male a peer. The consenting adult myth seldom mentions that true consent demands full equity and full disclosure. Equity involves the option to leave (Kidder, 1981) but, since women need a grade, they see themselves as trapped. Full disclosure rarely occurs. Professors seldom tell how many times it has happened before. They simply allow the naive student to believe that she is special.

Case Stories.

The following four stories appeared in The Lecherous Professor (Dzeich & Weiner, 1984) and demonstrate the subtleties of sexual harassment. The stories incorporate concepts of keying, suggest social rules developed by myths, and reveal the levels of acceptance or rejection of the persuasion offered by the professors.

> I knew that this professor chased his students so when he started flirting with me in class, I just ignored it. I didn't want anything to do with all that, and it made me nervous. But, one day after class he sort of cornered me as I was leaving. He backed me up against the wall and was touching me and telling me that he wanted me. He was almost shaking and very intense. I was trying to figure out how to get out of there without an awful scene. He started telling me how his wife didn't like oral sex and he felt frustrated because he had so much to give and wanted to give it to me. He was sweating and shaking and said, "I have

a magic tongue. That used to be my nickname." I couldn't believe it. I was frightened by him and wanted to laugh at the same time. I pulled away and ran out of the classroom. It still seems a little funny, but he stalks me in the halls and it's still scary to me.

Dr. _____ asked me to come to his office to help him rearrange his books. Maybe it was my fault for going in the first place. He has these high bookcases, and the only way you can reach them is to stand on this little stool. I remember I had on this blue tight skirt that made it hard for me to step off and on that stool, but the skirt was pretty long. After a while, he got up and walked over and started bumping the stool. At first I thought he was just kidding around, and I laughed. Then I got sort of scared because he almost knocked me over. I told him to be careful and that I didn't think he knew I was really scared. "I know you are, but the only way to keep from falling is for you to go about your business while I lay down on the floor here and watch you." I think that's exactly how he said it. I didn't know what else to do. I was afraid to leave, so I just kept on taking books down while he laid on the floor and looked up my dress at my underpants. Then I left, and he said thank you and never ever mentioned anything about it again. I guess I should have reported him to somebody, but I didn't know who. No one would have believed it anyway.

I had a typing teacher who used to come up and sit by me when I was typing and touch the side of my breast. He'd make rude comments about my behind and he usually made it a point to pinch me. He'd keep me after class to discuss a paper or show me areas where I needed help. I was an A student, but he always wanted me to stay. If I said no, he'd get very defensive. I was afraid he might not give me the A I deserved. The final straw was when I had gotten ink on my sweater from the typing ribbon and he offered to help me get it off. Well, he put his hands up my shirt, feeling me up, and I pushed him away and yelled. I told my parents, and they said I should go to the Dean. I had my boyfriend come and wait for me after class. I didn't want to start trouble, so I didn't say anything. I decided to change my program and not to have him for a teacher anymore. Even though I wanted to tell the Dean, I was afraid it would just mean more trouble.

Well, my freshman year I took a class. I didn't understand all of the readings, and by the time the final came around I found myself with an F. So I asked (my professor) him if I could talk to him about my grades, in his office. So I went to his office and he gave me a choice--either be with him or take the F. I was attracted to him a little, but there was no way I could take the F. So, I met him at his house, and I spent three hours with him in his bed. I had to close my eyes and pretend that I was with my boyfriend. I felt dirty, but I didn't get the F. He gave me

a D. Was it worth it? Yes and no. I felt it was something I had to do to save myself.

Keying.

All of these stories have some elements in common. For example, in all four stories the women were "keyed" or signaled or invited to play, but they denied what was really happening. The women were "keyed" as follows: In the first story, "he flirted with me"; in the second, "he asked me to come to his office to rearrange his books" (not a normal request); in the third, when she was typing he touched the side of her breast; in the fourth, the "keying" is implied in their mutual attraction for one another.

The second part of game playing involves understanding the rules of the game. The stories indicate the women's level of understanding. In the first story, the woman did not appear to understand the rules of the game as indicated by her comments: "I just ignored it"; "it made me nervous"; "I was frightened." The second story is similar to the first: "I thought he was just kidding around"; "I laughed"; "I got sort of scared"; "I didn't think he knew I was scared"; "I didn't know what else to do." In the third story, the woman seemed to play along with the professor: "I had a typing teacher who used to come up and sit by me when I was typing"; "he always wanted me to stay"; When the intensity of the game escalated she caught on and refused to continue to play as indicated by her report: "The final straw." In the fourth story, the woman understood the rules of the game as indicated: "he gave me a choice"; "there was no way I could take the F"; "I met him

at his house"; at which time she created a new game, "I had to close my eyes and pretend that I was with my boyfriend."

Social Rules Developed By Myths.

The looking and touching myth acts to extend the power disparity between men and women. Speaking words that shock and embarass act to extend the myth. The stories indicate how the professors wield their power. For example: in the first story, "and was touching me"; "telling me that he wanted me"; "his wife didn't like oral sex"; and "I have a magic tongue"; in the second story, "[he] looked up my dress at my underpants"; in the third story, "he'd make rude comments about my behind"; "pinch me"; "touch the side of my breast"; "put his hands up my shirt, feeling me up"; and the fourth story, "be with him or take the F"; "I spent three hours with him in his bed." Each example may be demonstrating the gatekeeping role played by the professor in an attempt to keep the power hierarchy in balance.

Failure to report suggests that nothing is wrong, and extends the power imbalance. Professors may believe, then, that since no one reported the incident, they got away with it. None of the stories in this research indicate that the women reported the professors to their superiors. The women communicate their non-reporting in these ways: in the first story, "he [still] stalks me in the halls"; in the second, "I guess I should have reported him to somebody"; in the third, "I wanted to tell the Dean, I was afraid it would just mean more trouble; and in the fourth story, she simply made no report.

Some men still perpetuate a macho self-image by "scoring" with women. The implication of this myth involves a social rule which says

that if the woman does not say no, then the man will advance until stopped. The myth acts to excuse men by suggesting that they cannot help themselves; it is beyond their control. The stories show examples of this: In the first story, "I ran out of the classroom"; in the second story, she did not stop the action; in the third story, "I pushed him away; and in the fourth story, she did not stop the action. The first story also suggests that this particular man was completely out of control, "he was sweating and shaking."

The consenting adult myth suggests that when one is attracted to a role or person, sex follows. When mixed with game theory, as suggested by our discussion on keying, the power disparity creates a situation where, even if the student has sex with the professor, she might not have done so were the male a peer. Since the women need a grade, the professors, in a sense, "trap their prey." Examples of the sense of being trapped are explained by the women: In the first story, "he sort of cornered me"; "He backed me up against the wall"; in the second story, "the only way to keep from falling is for you to go about your business while..."; in the third story, "he'd keep me after class"; "I was afraid he might not give me the A I deserved"; "I didn't want to start trouble"; in the fourth story, "I felt it was something I had to do to save myself."

Social Judgment-Involvement.

As suggested by social judgment-involvement theory, a person will make a judgment about a person or action after comparing it to their internal reference points, which may fall within a person's latitude of rejection, non-commitment, or acceptance. In the reported stories

of this research, the women were forced to accept or reject the professors and the suggested action, but they always had a choice in the matter. In the first story, the suggested action was clearly outside the woman's latitude of acceptance as characterized by her saying: "I didn't want anything to do with that"; "I couldn't believe it"; "I pulled away." The language entertains no acceptance of the idea. Because the professor acted in a way which was inside of her latitude of rejection, the action and the professor were both rejected.

In the second story, the report by the woman suggests that the action and the professor operated within her latitude of non-commitment. Comments, such as, "I told him to be careful"; "I just kept on taking books down while he laid on the floor"; "I guess I should have reported him to somebody," each suggest that she neither accepted/encouraged nor rejected/discouraged the action or the professor.

The third story suggests that the student had to decide between two incongruent sets of information. She wanted an A from the professor and he was touching her and asking her to remain after class. Perhaps that was tolerable, until he put his hands up her shirt at which time he crossed clearly over into her latitude of rejection. When he crossed the line she chose to reject the action, "I pushed him away and yelled" (she was now ready to risk losing the A, but by dropping out of the program she expected ratallation in some form), and reject the professor, "I decided to change my program and not have him for a teacher anymore."

The fourth story also suggests that the student had to decide between two sets of information, getting an F or going to bed with the professor. She initiated the conversation about her grades, and he offered the solution to the problem. Apparently he and his suggestion fell within her latitude of acceptance since she reported: "I asked him if I could talk to him about my grades, in his office" (depending on tone of voice); "I was attracted to him a little"; and "I spent three hours with him in his bed." It must have been well within her latitude of acceptance since she spent three hours. Her choice of action indicates that she accepted the action and the professor.

Discussion And Recommendations.

The feelings of powerlessness appear to be the single strongest element that continues to perpetuate sexual harassment. When women believe they are powerless, or have no choice, they fail to act. Not understanding the "rules of the game" also continues the problem. Failure to report may indicate a problem within the institutional structure, such as, no formal lines of communication for reporting such matters, no clear description of the rules of "the game," and no process by which women can claim their rights. Both sexes help create an environment ripe for sexual harassment. First, they try not to respond and hope it will go away; second, they attempt to impugne the reputations of the women attemting to change the system (Dzeich & Weiner, 1984); third, the reputations of the ritually active men are protected; and fourth, the issue of sexual harassment, until recently, has received little attention.

Female students need to have their consciousness raised about

what constitutes sexual harassment. They need to recognize that sexual harassment has become an issue which organizations now take seriously. So, if a woman experiences persistent sexual harassment, she does not have to put up with it and ignoring the situation will not make it go away. Confronting it by legal means, if necessary, is a viable option. But, communicating to someone else about the situation will immediately increase that person's sense of confidence.

Most educational institutions sincerely want to improve the social and educational environment within which students, faculty, administrators, and support staff study and work. However, not addressing the problem of sexual harassment with information about specific conditions, policies, and practices may, inadvertently, increase unwanted sexual harassment. Information about such behavior can address and prevent the problem (Bogart, 1987). Implementing policies concerning sexual harassment and communicating these policies to everyone as part of orientation and training programs should help everyone understand the institutional expectations.

If an institution wants to avoid a law suit, an "open-door" policy should exist. This means that a student can approach a female administrator, who acts as a sexual harassment counselor, to discuss any problems she may be experiencing. The victim needs assurance that someone in authority will listen and has the power to stop the harassment without retaliation to the student. Neglecting to implement this policy can hurt an institution's defense if taken to court declaring that the school had no grievance procedure and, therefore, did not concern itself with the welfare of its students.

After hearing a complaint, Strayer and Rapoport (1986) say that a specific time limit should be set to deal with the issue and to communicate to the complainant the results of the institutions investigation. Institutions also must be discreet when dealing with sexual harassment complaints because "the victim is usually embarrassed or humiliated enough without being put on display" (Caudill & Donaldson, 1986). Keeping such an allegation quiet, whether legitimate or not, can also protect the institution's reputation.

The institution should also contact other members of the organization who would be concerned with the accusation. Specifically, the harasser's immediate supervisor should be notified that an investigation has begun. A review of institutional policy should be made and recent laws should be studied. A review of the history of the department or area in which the sexual harassment has allegedly occured should be conducted to become familiar with the complainant's history as well as that of the accused. An institution then needs to conduct interviews, including past students of the alleged harasser, colleagues of the complainant and, finally, the accused himself. Once legitimacy has been established the institution can proceed to take appropriate action.

The reasons for sexual harassment no longer matter. What does matter is what institutions do to protect themselves and others against the harassers and how they handle sexual harassment cases. No institution should take an accusation lightly. By following these suggestions, including the creation of policies and procedures,

institutions lay a solid foundation for assisting those who find themselves having to cope with inappropriate behavior.

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